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European perspectives on a longer Atlantic World – 4-5 May 2010, University of Turin. Marco Mariano and Federica Morelli (Coord.)

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European Perspectives on a Longer Atlantic World

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Texte intégral

- 1 Atlantic history is less a new historiographical trend than a methodological approach which rejects both the traditional narration of the occidentalization of the world and the broad generalizations of world history based on economicistic determinism. Atlantic history focuses on men and women seen as workers and consumers, as well as on their political, cultural, and religious practices and gender differences, rather than on colonial economies or colonial empires. While this methodological approach has flourished mostly in the US and the UK, its reception in continental Europe has been controversial, due to both historiographical traditions (the primacy of national histories) and extra-academic concerns (the mistrust towards *Atlantica* in the cold war years). In recent years, however, a new generation of European historians have embraced the Atlantic history framework and is making an original contribution to the field. The objective of this dossier, which brings together junior and established scholars based in France and Italy, is twofold: on the one hand, it provides a sample of a European approach to the history of the Atlantic world and, on the other, it contributes to question the prevailing pattern of periodization in Atlantic history.

- 2 Our European approach to the Atlantic world is based on three major methodological points. First, focusing on the circulation of ideas and political models, it breaks with the traditional emphasis on the social and cultural factors at the core of Atlantic history. Intellectual history, with its stress on the concept of “circulation” and “re-appropriation” rather than “spread” and “influence,” can contribute to the configuration of the Atlantic space, as the studies on abolitionism have fully shown. Furthermore, as the article by Matteo Battistini on Thomas Paine illustrates, an account of Atlantic history cannot hold on to a strict distinction between the political and the social. Instead, the political and the societal are interrelated, both conceptual camera lenses through which the Atlantic world can be more accurately captured.
- 3 The second point has to do with the geographical scope –a controversial issue in Atlantic studies. As a matter of fact, Atlantic history—as it has been shaped in these two last decades—rarely takes into consideration the depth of Europe as a continent, as it tends to narrow its analysis to the countries facing the Atlantic. These articles aim, on the contrary, to extend the geographical dimension and integrate regions such as the Mediterranean space, and central Europe, which are fundamental to understand much of the Atlantic dynamics between the 16th and the 19th centuries. The point is not the relations between Atlantic and Global history but, rather, the reconfiguration of the *héritages croisés* between Europe, Africa, and America widening and redefining the frontiers of the Atlantic space. How far Atlantic developments penetrated in and reshaped the worlds in which Europeans ventured on the one hand, and how far Europeans’ interactions with these other worlds affected Europe itself on the other, are interesting and important questions, as the article by Irene Fattacciu on cocoa consumption shows. If the Atlantic framework cannot explain all of the things that happened on the three continents, it can still provide a useful perspective on many of them.
- 4 Finally, Atlantic history has been mostly conceptualized and practiced as a sub-discipline of early modern history, due to reasons now made abundantly clear by several review essays on its genealogy¹. However, this traditional periodization is now being questioned in many ways². On the one hand, a *longue durée* approach to the Atlantic world implies a closer look at its pre-modern, Mediterranean origins, as the article by Jean-Frédéric Schaub shows. On the other, the end of empires, the age of democratic revolutions, and American independences hardly put an end to the Atlantic world; rather, they recast its geography and its contours, as the article by Marco Mariano argues. 19th-century technological progress in navigation and transportation, mass migrations across the Atlantic, anti-mercantilist and free-trade policies, the opposition to nationalism and the circulation of ideologies of nation-building call for a re-periodization of Atlantic history, which on the one hand challenges prevailing distinctions between early modern, modern, and contemporary history and, on the other, prompts a reconsideration of the relations between the Atlantic basin and other world regions.

Notes

1 Allison Games, «Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities», *American Historical Review*, 111, 3, June 2006, 743-44. For a genealogy of Atlantic history see also William O'Reilly, «Genealogies of Atlantic History», *Atlantic Studies* 1, 1, 2004, 66-84; Bertrand Van Ruymbeke, «L'histoire atlantique aux États-Unis : la périphérie au centre», *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* [en línea], Coloquios, 2008, 19 September 2008, and the seminal essay by Bernard Bailyn, «The Idea of Atlantic History», *Itinerario*, 20 (1996), 19-44.

2 Donna Gabaccia, «A Long Atlantic in a Wider World», *Atlantic Studies* 1, 1, 2004, 8. See also

Emma Rothschild, "Late Atlantic History," in Nicholas Canny, Philip Morgan (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World 1450-1850*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; Hans-Jürgen Puhle, «Trajectories of Western Modernization Around the Atlantic: One World or Many?» in Horst Pietschmann (ed.), *Atlantic History. History of the Atlantic System 1580-1830*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002.

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Auteurs

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